



Higher Education Review of Walsall College

December 2014

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Walsall College. The review took place from 1 to 2 December 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Hilary Grainger
- Professor Paul Brunt
- Mr Matthew Kitching (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Walsall College and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code)¹ setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
 - the setting and maintenance of academic standards
 - the quality of student learning opportunities
 - the information provided about higher education provision
 - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

In reviewing Walsall College the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.³ A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)⁴ and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Walsall College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Walsall College.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities is **commended**.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Walsall College.

- The carefully tailored provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, supported by the effective use of technology, to enable students to develop as independent, reflective learners (Expectations B3 and B4).
- The wide range of inclusive student feedback mechanisms which help maintain and enhance the quality of student learning opportunities (Expectations B5 and B3, Enhancement).
- The well considered and high levels of student involvement in quality assurance processes, including programme design and review (Expectations B5, B1, A3.3 and B8).
- The comprehensive and thorough approach to programme monitoring and review and its use to enhance student learning opportunities (Expectations B8 and A3.3, Enhancement).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Walsall College.

By May 2015:

- specify programme level aims and learning outcomes in all programme handbooks (Expectations C and A3.2)
- strengthen the approval and monitoring processes to ensure that information is fit for purpose, accessible and transparent (Expectation C).

Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The College prides itself on its work involving students in quality assurance and enhancement. The College is indeed performing well in this area but is ambitious in relation to student engagement and is seeking to take this work 'beyond outstanding'. The College believes this can be achieved, at least in part, by acting on recommendations contained within a report produced as a result of a joint Association of Colleges and National Union of Students project.

The College outlines its approach towards student engagement within its Student Voice Strategy 2014-15, which clearly states that the College seeks to deliver the 'best services

possible' for students by ensuring they involve students in as many different ways as possible to shape developments in the learning environment.

A wide range of feedback mechanisms are in place under a scheme which they promote as '7 ways to have your say'. These include a two tier student representation system, student surveys, unit module evaluations, a student conference, regular meetings with the Principal, the College's Compliments and Complaints Scheme, and focus groups. Feedback provided by students is used to inform an annual student voice action plan. In addition the use of technology including the College's virtual learning environment (VLE) and the Student Voice site to communicate with students is effective. This results in an acute understanding among students about changes being made within the College and enables them to feel part of the process. This is well supplemented by information contained on posters and notice boards across the College.

Student involvement in committees is routine across the College. The Board of Governors has the Student Voice Committee as a standing committee and members include Executive Course Representatives and Student Governors. The Higher Education Management Board also has three student members and there are high levels of student involvement in periodic review activity.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Higher Education Review](#).

About Walsall College

Walsall College is a medium sized general further education college located in Walsall, eight miles north-west of Birmingham. Established in 1952 it is the only further education college in the borough, employs 690 staff and has an annual turnover of £35 million. The College operates from two main campuses. Wisemore Campus, opened in September 2009, houses five of the six 'Curriculum Cluster areas'. The Green Lane Campus houses the construction and engineering provision.

The College's student profile comprises 4,600 14-19 year olds; 6,550 adults (including higher education, international and work based students); and over 1,000 apprentices employed with public and private sector employers. In total the College has about 4,000 full-time equivalent students on further education programmes and 193 full-time equivalent students on higher education programmes and these are based across both campuses.

The College has a well established relationship with its main awarding organisation, Pearson, with whom it runs BTEC Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas. However the College also works in partnership with the University of Wolverhampton for its teacher training programmes and is developing a new partnership with Birmingham City University which sees a new Level 6 offer for 2014-15.

Walsall College was the first general further education college to receive an Outstanding Ofsted rating under the new inspection framework in the UK, and the first ever to receive a Grade 1 in the Black Country.

The College has a strong commitment to widening participation and to providing programmes of vocational relevance to the area. These twin aims provide the strategic underpinning for the College's mission for its higher education which is to 'ensure Walsall College has a wide ranging, vocational offer at higher education level which is driven by both employer demand and the needs of individuals in their personal and professional development'. The College looks to ensure progression for the diverse group of students this College serves:

- students at Walsall College progressing from Level 3 to Level 4
- new school-leaver entrants into Level 4
- adults returning to study at Level 4 and above for personal or professional development reasons.

Since the last QAA review (Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review 2010), there have been developments across most aspects of the College's higher education provision with changes in the course portfolio, the development of a higher education brand, changes to the course monitoring process and a greatly enhanced VLE. The management structure for higher education has significantly changed in terms of roles and responsibilities. The College has reviewed the effectiveness of its mechanisms for ensuring delivery and the maintenance of academic standards, with the result that a number of committees have been established or revised, including the Learning and Quality Committee, Senior Management Team, Higher Education Management Board, Higher Education Tutor Committee, Higher Education Assessment Board and Student Voice Committee. Further changes include the appointment of a Vice Principal for Business and Partnerships (August 2012) whose role includes the strategic vision and growth of the higher education provision and the appointment of the Deputy Principal for Delivery and Success (September 2012) whose role includes driving all aspects of performance and quality improvement across the College. The previous Heads of School roles were upgraded to Heads of Cluster in 2010, with an increased focus on quality assurance and strategic direction.

The College has identified that its key challenge going forward is to grow the higher education provision and to increase the range of subjects available as well as increase the number of students entering into its higher education provision at Levels 4, 5 and 6. Over time the College is planning controlled growth in line with government policies and local need. Within that strategic mission the College therefore aims to continue to increase curriculum innovation, develop and innovate responsive delivery models, continue to develop effective partnerships, and continue to develop staff through additional support for scholarly activity and opportunities for further application of professional practice.

The College has responded well to the recommendations and good practice from the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review report in 2010. There are no actions outstanding from that report and indeed some of the areas have been turned into strengths of the College.

Explanation of the findings about Walsall College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#) is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations

Expectation (A1): In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* are met by:

- **positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications**
- **naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications**
- **awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes**

b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics

c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework

d) consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

Quality Code, Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards

Findings

1.1 Walsall College is not a degree-awarding body and responsibility for setting and maintaining standards therefore lies with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The specific role of the College in relation to delivering academic standards is set out in the formal agreements with its two awarding bodies and one awarding organisation (Pearson). Wolverhampton University validates the Professional Teacher Training provision and Birmingham City University validates the three Level 6 courses delivered by the College.

1.2 Key performance indicators (KPIs) outline the College's commitment to the maintenance of academic standards and allow for the monitoring of progress in higher education. The College's Academic Regulations: Higher Education and its quality assurance processes support adherence to the academic standards of its awarding bodies by means of careful cross-referencing.

1.3 The approach taken by the College in respect to the maintaining of academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation allows the Expectation to be met.

1.4 The review team scrutinised the College's processes and their effectiveness in maintaining academic standards through consideration of documentation, quality assurance procedures, minutes of meetings, external examiner reports, programme documentation and meetings with staff and students.

1.5 The Academic Regulations: Higher Education shows the College to be fully cognisant of national qualification frameworks and makes it clear that the Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas, which form the majority of its provision, adhere to the separate qualification frameworks of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and the National Qualifications Framework for England and Northern Ireland (NQF). The College positions its higher education provision at the appropriate level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) by cross-referencing the specific qualification and defined programme learning outcomes.

1.6 The Academic Regulations: Higher Education and the Course Development and Approval Terms of Reference outline the context of the setting and maintaining of academic standards. The College ensures that all proposals going forward to external validation are appropriate in terms of their standard relative to their position in the FHEQ and any relevant Subject Benchmark Statements to which they relate.

1.7 Programme approval and review panels ensure compliance of programmes with partner and external regulations and policies, including the FHEQ. The College undertakes responsibility for the periodic review of Pearson awards, with a three-year cycle of review in place for the monitoring and review of programmes to ensure that the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether or not these are maintained. Awarding bodies take responsibility for their own programmes. Staff development ensures staff are well prepared to take responsibility for ensuring that there is sufficient volume of study to demonstrate that learning outcomes can be achieved in the context of the FHEQ.

1.8 All assessment briefs are internally verified and checked for coverage of programme specifications prior to delivery. Pearson allocates subject-specific external examiners to a programme to conduct sampling of assessed students' work and to provide judgments and feedback. Course teams work closely with external examiners to ensure that the College's implementation, delivery and assessment are consistent with national standards. External examiner reports from University of Wolverhampton and Birmingham City University confirm that the standards set for the awards are appropriate for qualifications at the relevant level against the FHEQ.

1.9 The review team concludes that the robustness of the processes in place to maintain the academic standards of awards offered by Walsall College on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies meet Expectation A1 and that the associated risk in this area is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.1): In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.

Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards

Findings

1.10 Walsall College is not a degree-awarding body. Its courses are validated by Pearson and by the University of Wolverhampton and Birmingham City University. It aligns its own Academic Regulations: Higher Education to ensure the security of academic standards and makes reference to Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ.

1.11 The Academic Regulations, Quality Strategy and Higher Education Enhancement Cycle provide a clear articulation of frameworks and regulations to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications. The Higher Education Management Board and Learning and Quality Committee structure and attendant terms of reference and staff responsibilities are articulated clearly.

1.12 The College Senior Management Team holds overall responsibility for the management of academic standards and for the quality of higher education courses leading to awards validated by the College awarding bodies and awarding organisation.

1.13 The academic governance arrangements are articulated in the Higher Education Strategy 2014-16. The responsibility for the strategic direction of the College provision lies with the Corporation of the College, which receives regular reports from the Principal. Both the Deputy Principal and Vice Principal oversee higher education provision; the Vice Principal, Business and Partnership oversees development and growth; and the Deputy Principal, Delivery and Success is responsible for academic affairs, the higher education curriculum and attendant processes. Higher education is delivered in parallel with further education. The responsibility for the quality of delivery is vested in the curriculum areas, but oversight is devolved to the Deputy Principal. The Academic Regulations: Higher Education and any proposed amendments are approved by the Senior Management Team through the Higher Education Management Board. Higher education provision is organised into five Curriculum Cluster areas managed by Head of Clusters who are supported by Curriculum Managers. The Professional Development Department at Walsall College leads the delivery of teacher training activity.

1.14 The clear and comprehensive academic frameworks, regulations and processes in place, aligning with those of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation, allow the Expectation to be met.

1.15 The review team scrutinised the College's processes and their effectiveness through consideration of evidence provided in documented quality assurance procedures, minutes of meetings, external examiner reports and meetings with staff and students. The Higher Education Management Board meets six times per annum and is charged with reviewing all aspects of higher education provision. This includes the review of higher education performance through success data, course reviews, Grade Book, the interactive assessment tracking system, allows students (and staff) to access their progress and feedback on their work at all times throughout their course, external examiner reports, student surveys and Student Voice. Minutes from the Higher Education Tutor Committee are also reviewed and the sharing of good practice across the College is discussed at a strategic level. The Student Voice Committee is a Governor Committee which discusses issues of

concern to students and tracks the impact of the Student Voice Strategy which aims to provide students with the opportunity to play a central role in the development and review of the higher education activity at Walsall College. Recommendations for new programme developments are also presented to this Board as well as the marketing of higher education programmes.

1.16 The Higher Education Tutor Committee comprises tutors and managers and meets 10 times a year. Agendas are generated and actions followed up. Meetings are chaired by a designated Head of Curriculum Cluster with a cross-College responsibility to support higher education provision and ensures continuity across the leadership and management structure by attending the Higher Education Management Board, the Learning and Quality Committee, Senior Management Team meetings, Periodic Reviews and Assessment Board meetings.

1.17 The Higher Education Tutor Committee focuses on the quality of the student experience and continuous improvement and enhancement and provides support for new tutors and verifiers.

1.18 The Senior Management Team delegates authority to the Assessment Board to make decisions on student progression and the award of academic credit.

1.19 An Assessment Board is held for each course of study leading to any of the awards offered by the College. An annual assessment is held for all BTEC Higher National Programmes validated by Pearson. Birmingham City University and the University of Wolverhampton hold their own Assessment Boards for the awards they validate. External examiners are appointed by Pearson, the University of Wolverhampton and Birmingham City University in accordance with their own regulations and meet with the delivery team, sample a range of assessment and verification decisions against national standards, and submit a report.

1.20 The College approach to assessment is articulated in the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and indicates a wide range of assessment methods. The Assessment Regulations are set out in the Academic Regulations: Higher Education. These are standard assessment regulations for programmes of study leading to the award of Pearson BTEC Higher National Qualifications. Student handbooks make specific reference to benchmarking. Course teams adhere to the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment (Levels 4-7).

1.21 External examiner reports point to the robustness of the assessment under review, although the review team noted that the Pearson external examiner document does not ask directly for confirmation of academic standards.

1.22 The review team concludes that the College has transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks to govern the delivery of academic credit and qualifications on behalf of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation and thereby meets Expectation A2.1, and that the risk in this area is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards

Findings

1.23 The College works with two awarding bodies and one awarding organisation. Consequently the College must remain cognisant of varied requirements relating to the construction of definitive programme information. Programmes delivered in partnership with the College's awarding bodies are franchised, as opposed to validated, and programme specifications are therefore ultimately constructed and approved by the awarding bodies. Programmes delivered in partnership with Pearson require the institution to compile a programme from a broad array of units, some of which are specified as mandatory. In this instance the awarding organisation is responsible for the overall curriculum but not for specifying the individual units that will form holistic programmes within the College. Programme leaders and teams refer to the awarding organisation's assessment and delivery guidance when developing and designing programme specifications. The College creates a range of information to populate appropriate documents and produce student handbooks, which, for its awarding bodies, must also be approved, in writing, before they are circulated.

1.24 The College's documented approach to the production, approval, monitoring and amendment of definitive programme information, subject to being followed, allows the Expectation to be met.

1.25 The review team examined student handbooks, programme specifications and documentation relating to approval and review. The team also scrutinised the College's Quality Strategy 2014-15 and Academic Regulations as well as meeting with staff and students.

1.26 Definitive programme information including detail on units, teaching methods, assessment modes, learning outcomes and credit tariffs is communicated to students. This information is supplied in a number of formats, including student handbooks, and often at unit level. Students are clear about how to access programme information and found it to be useful and informative.

1.27 Pre-approval panels discuss definitive programme information as part of their considerations. One such example included a condition that the existing programme specification for a franchise programme be amended to reflect delivery at the College campus. Course documentation is considered at the College's Curriculum, Planning and Innovation Meeting.

1.28 All programmes have student handbooks, although the approach and level of information was inconsistent. The handbooks for provision delivered through one particular awarding body included the complete programme specifications. This differed in other handbooks where information was often focused more on unit information, aims and assessment details. This is discussed further under Expectation C.

1.29 The review team concludes that due to the careful consideration of definitive programme information, approval arrangements within the awarding bodies and awarding

organisation, and high student satisfaction with the information they receive about their programmes, Expectation A2.2 is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.

Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards

Findings

1.30 The College's programmes have been developed as a variety of partnership types with two awarding bodies and one awarding organisation. Processes regarding the design and approval of higher education programmes are outlined in the Academic Regulations: Higher Education and in partnership agreements with awarding bodies and the awarding organisation. Responsibility for programme development and approval rests with the awarding body or awarding organisation. Similarly, awarding bodies and the awarding organisation ensure that the qualifications delivered are appropriately aligned to the FHEQ and other external reference points.

1.31 The College and its awarding bodies and organisation consider the FHEQ and other external reference points to be important for its higher education. The approaches taken by the College allow the Expectation to be met.

1.32 Ideas for the development of new programmes are subject to an internal two-stage process. The first stage is for programme teams to develop ideas to ensure that any proposed course aligns with the College's strategic aims and that the requisite resources (staff expertise, appropriate physical resources) are in place. Student demand and future employability are considered at this point.

1.33 At Stage 2, the Course Development Approval Panel determines whether the course proposals progress to internal validation. Some require more work before being progressed further. The awarding bodies are informed at key stages of development. An approval event is organised by the awarding body before the programme is run, or in the case of Pearson programmes, confirmation that the programme can run within the limits of being an approved centre.

1.34 The College demonstrates a suitable awareness of the FHEQ and that programme outcomes are suitably matched to the qualification descriptors and meet the academic frameworks of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation.

1.35 There is an appropriate level of externality in panel membership of validation events. Employer and student feedback are also considered throughout the stages of programme design and approval. The College noted a need to increase 'direct employer and student participation in the approval stages', a point that was raised in the 2010 Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review and the College has made significant progress in this respect.

1.36 The regulatory framework of each awarding body and awarding organisation defines the academic standards of the award. The College, in turn, takes account of the requirements of the awarding body and awarding organisation through its policies and procedures for higher education. The internal approval process and awarding body validation events confirm that programmes are designed to align with Expectation A3.1 of the Quality Code. College staff and their awarding body partners liaise on assessment

matters to assure academic standards through cross-marking and moderation events following approval.

1.37 The team concludes that it has confidence in the College's management of its responsibilities as set out in its partnership agreements to ensure that each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. The review team concludes that the close integration of the College with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation ensures that Expectation A3.1 is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.2): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:

- **the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment**
- **both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.**

Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards

Findings

1.38 The College has well established frameworks and regulations to govern how credit is awarded. These are reflected in the partnership agreements with the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Such information is made explicit to students in student handbooks. Awarding bodies and the awarding organisation are responsible for the approval of programmes, and subsequently monitor programmes through annual and periodic processes, and oversee the examination boards.

1.39 The College and awarding bodies have a partnership agreement and a management structure and processes in place to enable oversight of its higher education provision, and therefore to allow the Expectation to be met.

1.40 The team reviewed a range of documentary evidence. The course (and module) handbooks reflect awarding body and awarding organisation academic frameworks and regulations. The Higher Education Academic Regulations Handbook further identifies the assessment requirements for Pearson awarded programmes. The College's VLE also provides links to awarding body and awarding organisation academic regulations, to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the requirements of credit.

1.41 Programme leaders agree annual assessment plans which include details of assessment type, confirmation of learning outcomes assessed, deadlines, first marker and internal verification. Student work is marked and moderated by College tutors initially, and followed by shared moderation with the awarding bodies, before samples are subject to external examiner scrutiny. At specified intervals during the year the awarding bodies convene an assessment board, which is usually attended by the external examiner. Grades are confirmed at this point by the partners and any resubmissions agreed. External examiners confirm their satisfaction with the board procedures and satisfactory achievement of learning outcomes in their reports. Pearson awarded programmes have first and second marking undertaken within the College, and the College links directly with the external examiner. External examiners confirm their satisfaction with assessment processes. For these awards confirmation of credit and award of the qualification is confirmed by the Higher Education Assessment Board.

1.42 Students are aware of the requirements to achieve credit. The College has suitable processes for accommodated assessments for those students with protected characteristics.

1.43 The College has, with its awarding bodies, developed appropriate mechanisms for the award of credit and final qualifications. Assessment is used to give students the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the relevant learning outcomes. In order to ensure that threshold academic standards are met, decisions to award credit or qualifications are based on robust evidence that the module learning outcomes (for the

award of credit) or programme learning outcomes (for the award of a qualification) have been achieved. The team noted that some programme handbooks were not explicit in relation to the specification of programme aims and programme learning outcomes. This has led to a recommendation under Expectation C.

1.44 The team concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met and the level of risk is low. The College has systems to ensure that it is compliant with the academic regulations of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation in this respect, and these are working effectively.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.3): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.

Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards

Findings

1.45 The College's Quality Strategy outlines the approaches taken to the monitoring and review of programmes. There is a 'bottom up' approach to College self-assessment, which begins with the termly Course Review. These reviews inform the curriculum area Self-Assessment Reports and Higher Education Self-Assessment Report. These meet the requirements of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Progress of annual monitoring is overseen through the College's deliberative committee structure, principally via the Higher Education Management Board, and governor sign off.

1.46 The College undertakes responsibility for periodic reviews of Pearson awards, on a three-year cycle. For the programmes governed by awarding bodies, this is the responsibility of the awarding body.

1.47 The College has a management structure and processes in place to enable oversight of its higher education provision, meet the review requirements of awarding bodies and the awarding organisation, and allows the Expectation to be met.

1.48 The team reviewed documentary evidence, minutes from the Higher Education Management Board, and questioned staff in meetings about the process of annual monitoring, review and oversight by the College. The self-evaluation document identifies both internal College annual monitoring processes, and other annual and periodic review mechanisms required by the awarding bodies.

1.49 The annual review process commences with module leaders completing the termly Course Review. Every term course teams triangulate student progress and course success with survey outcomes, student voice activity, observation outcomes, internal verification and external examiner reports, to review and evaluate each course. Action plans are updated and monitored. Higher education course reviews inform the curriculum area Self-Assessment Reports as well as the Higher Education Self-Assessment Report.

1.50 In addition, the College uses Quality Summits and Courses in Intensive Care to inform its review procedures. The former is a termly scrutiny of higher education data, while the latter is a closer scrutiny of a programme where quality assurance mechanisms trigger a cause for concern. There is also a Quality Evaluation and Development report for higher education.

1.51 The College periodically and thoroughly reviews its awards validated by Pearson every three years. Panel membership has an appropriate level of externality with student, external academic and industrial participants. Students are particularly positive regarding their involvement in the monitoring and review of their programmes. The level of student involvement in quality assurance processes is noted as good practice under Expectation B5. The awarding bodies also require their programmes to be reviewed and revalidated on a periodic basis, and conduct this process in an equivalent way.

1.52 Programme teams review existing provision by drawing on data from module level feedback, student performance, and external examiner feedback and present this through the annual review process. Through the Higher Education Management Board, which reports to the College Senior Management Team and Governors, and the informal interactions and effective management within the higher education teaching team, the College has oversight of its existing provision and of new programme developments. The processes report that academic standards are achieved and that the requirements of the awarding body or awarding organisation are being maintained. The comprehensive and thorough approach to programme monitoring and review and its use to enhance student learning opportunities is noted under Expectation B8 as good practice.

1.53 The College has systems to enable oversight and regular review of the standards of its provision from module level to the senior levels within the College. The College's approach to monitoring and review is noted as good practice under Expectation B8. The team concludes that Expectation A3.3 is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.4): In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:

- **UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved**
- **the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.**

Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards

Findings

1.54 The College is not a degree-awarding body. The University of Wolverhampton and Birmingham City University determine programme design and development for the higher education courses validated by them and delivered by the College. They also take responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities in line with their own regulations and procedures. Where the College delivers Pearson BTEC Higher National qualifications, programme leaders and teams use the nationally devised and accredited specification for each qualification for all planning and assessment. The College refers to Pearson's assessment and delivery guidance when developing and designing programmes. The awarding bodies and awarding organisation provide external examiners.

1.55 The College and its awarding bodies consider the FHEQ and other external reference points to be important for its higher education provision. The approaches taken allow the Expectation to be met.

1.56 The review team examined evidence, including policies and procedures and minutes of validation meetings, and met staff and students in meetings.

1.57 The process for programme design and approval is articulated in the Academic Regulations: Higher Education. There are two stages to the internal process. Stage 1, Course Development Approval ensures that the proposed programmes align with the College's Strategic Ambitions. Stage 2 involves the Internal Validation by Curriculum Planning Group and Innovation meeting and external approval is sought from Pearson or the awarding body at key stages of the course development process. The College uses external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards. The Course Development Approval strategy makes clear that external membership in the form of an academic peer from another institution, a professional subject specialist, or a representative from industry is a requirement. Employer and student feedback are also considered throughout the stages of programme design and approval.

1.58 An approval event is organised by the awarding body before a programme is run, or in the case of Pearson programmes, confirmation that the programme can run within the limits of being an approved centre. The College needed to increase 'direct employer and student participation in the approval stages'. The College wishes to further increase its involvement with employers in the design and delivery of higher education programmes and is making considerable progress in this respect.

1.59 The College takes into account student feedback as well as external expertise drawn from industry partners and clients when determining unit context and the design of assessment briefs and projects. Prior to delivery programme leaders agree an annual assessment plan. External examiners provided by Pearson, University of Wolverhampton and Birmingham City University confirm threshold and academic standards.

1.60 All Pearson courses are assessed through internal assessment allowing delivery tailored to local requirements. The College follows the academic regulations of its awarding bodies in respect of the marking and grading of student work. The assessment of learning outcomes is verified internally and externally by external examiner involvement prior to the Assessment Board. Standard assessment regulations are in place for courses leading to Pearson BTEC Higher National Qualifications. Course teams adhere to the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment (Levels 4-7). Students are referred to the Course Handbooks for further details. Assessment and learning outcomes are outlined in the Academic Regulations: Higher Education.

1.61 The close relationship of the College with its awarding bodies and organisation together with the College's own processes and procedures ensure that the College employs external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards. The review team thus concludes that Expectation A3.4 is met and the level of risk in this area is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.62 In reaching its judgement the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.63 All seven of the expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated level of risk is low in each case. There were no recommendations, affirmations or good practice in any of the expectations in this area, though two areas of good practice identified under Expectations B5 and B8 are also relevant to this judgement area, as is one recommendation identified under Information.

1.64 The review team note that the primary responsibility for much of this judgement area lies not with the College but with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The College has good relationships with its awarding bodies and organisation and responds appropriately to their requirements. The College has internal policies and systems to ensure that it can meet the requirements of the awarding bodies and organisation, and systems are effectively implemented. The College has good processes to maintain academic standards, and staff and students have a clear understanding of standards.

1.65 The review team concludes that the maintenance of academic standards of awards offered by the College on behalf of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme Design and Approval

Findings

2.1 The College has a strategic approach to higher education programme development, design and approval. Its awarding bodies oversee the final approval process, in accordance with the partnership agreements. The College ensures that it operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes for its higher education provision. The terms of reference for Course Development Approval describes a two-stage internal process, which then has to be approved (in the case of modifications) or validated in the case of new proposals by the awarding body or confirmed by the awarding organisation. The timing of the approval of courses is planned and outlined in the Higher Education Enhancement Cycle.

2.2 The approach taken by the College in respect to the design and approval of its higher education provision, and its close relationship with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation, allows the Expectation to be met.

2.3 The review team considered a range of documentary evidence and responses in meetings to investigate the approach the College takes to programme design and approval.

2.4 Programme approval begins internally with a two-stage process. The first stage is for programme teams to develop their ideas to ensure that any proposed course aligns with the College's strategic aims and the requisite resources (such as staff expertise and appropriate physical resources) are in place. Student demand and future employability are considered at this point.

2.5 At Stage 2, the Course Development Approval Panel determines whether the course proposals can progress to internal validation. Some require further work before being progressed. The awarding bodies are informed at key stages of development. An approval event is organised by the awarding body before the programme is run, or in the case of Pearson programmes, confirmation that the programme can run within the limits of being an approved centre. There is an appropriate level of externality in validation panels.

2.6 There are opportunities for input from external and employer engagement for input at the design and approval stage, and the College's own staff had considerable industry expertise. The involvement of students in quality assurance processes is noted as good practice under Expectation B5.

2.7 The review team concludes that the College fulfils its responsibilities with respect to programme design approval in line with the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B2): Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission*

Findings

2.8 The College's regulatory framework for admissions is outlined in their Higher Education Academic Regulations and also articulated through the Higher Education Admissions Policy and Procedure which seeks to ensure admissions are conducted in a fair, transparent and reliable manner. Admissions are further supported by policies concerning Recognition of Prior Learning, Safer Recruitment and Selection, and International Recruitment and Support. These are overseen by the College's admissions team which holds responsibility for the admissions process. Admissions criteria are agreed during course approval, reviewed through annual monitoring systems and form a clear part of the terms of reference for periodic review

2.9 The College's clearly documented and comprehensive arrangements for the management and oversight of admissions allow the Expectation to be met.

2.10 The review team examined the College's Higher Education Admissions Policy and Procedure, other policies pertinent to admissions, and the Higher Education Course Guide. The review team also met with students and staff, including staff with responsibility for recruitment and admissions.

2.11 Admissions are an integral part of the College's Quality Strategy 2014-15 and Enhancement Cycle and are routinely considered at agreed points within the College's internal quality assurance system. For instance, admissions were considered as part of the periodic review of hospitality where reflection took place over their admissions practice in 2014 due to lower than anticipated success rates.

2.12 Staff members acting as admissions tutors are provided with effective training on an annual basis which is designed to ensure that the right learner is placed onto the right programme. All students are interviewed and students are universally positive about their admissions experience. Students feel pre-arrival information is accurate and comprehensive and that the process is supportive. Students who had progressed directly from lower level programmes within the College feel that information about the programme they had joined was comprehensive. The College runs an induction survey, again showing student satisfaction with admissions.

2.13 On account of the well established policy framework, evidence of reflection through formal processes, and high student satisfaction relating to admissions the team concludes Expectation B2 is met and the level of associated risk low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.14 The College's approach to the review and enhancement of learning opportunities and effective learning and teaching practices is articulated in a range of strategies. The Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy comprises six key objectives to provide educational experiences which enable students to become skilled, professional and enterprising by offering a curriculum that is inclusive, relevant and current and promotes progression. This is informed by the FHEQ and devised in consultation with staff and students and input from Pearson, external examiners and link personnel from its awarding bodies. The College operates an Observation and Learning Walks Policy, a Professional Development Strategy, and a Scholarly Activity Policy, which provides remission for staff from teaching. The quality of teaching and learning at higher education is monitored, reviewed and evaluated continually by means of a robust process in line with the further education process. Staff performance is monitored on a fortnightly basis and consistent poor grading results in four weeks of intensive coaching before any re-observation takes place.

2.15 The College has strategies and policies in place to review and enhance teaching and learning practices, the learning environment and student engagement. The approaches taken by the College allow the Expectation to be met.

2.16 The review team scrutinised documentation, processes and policies and met staff, employers and students to determine the ways in which the College enhances the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner and enhance their analytical, critical and creative thinking.

2.17 College Learning and Teaching Coaches work with teams to ensure that they are well equipped, share pedagogic practices and feel supported. There is an extended induction process in place for new staff and learning and development coaches support this activity. Strong links exist with employers in relation to teaching and in particular assessment and Industry Expert Learning Walks encourage external specialists to advise the College on the currency and relevance of vocational courses. The Student Voice Strategy is one of a number of feedback mechanisms contributing to enhancement and identified as good practice under Expectation B5.

2.18 The College provides a broad range of continuous professional development and there is evidence of significant engagement by staff. Staff value the mandatory continuous professional development activities. The College is engaging with the Higher Education Academy, through seminars and fellowship.

2.19 The College sets targets for retention, achievement and success, which are monitored at course level through the quality processes, and at governor level through the Learning and Quality Committee. The annual Higher Education Performance Summaries of retention, achievement and success are strategies designed to secure and support the quality of the student learning experience.

2.20 Students benefit from an inclusive range of support and guidance, ranging from dyslexia support to assistance with visas. There is a wide range of opportunities for students to provide feedback on all aspects of learning and teaching, including '7 ways to have your say', the way in which the Student Voice strategy is published to students. The College has systems and processes in place to ensure effective engagement of higher education students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The online individual learning plan, My Action Planning System, builds on good practice identified by the Integrated Quality Enhancement Review in 2010, and was commended by students. My Action Planning System links with the Support Register allowing tutors to target support and prompt intervention. Support services are delivered by the central Student Journey Team and Inclusive Support Team and the Early Support Register is used to identify students at risk. New technology is employed effectively to support student learning. The VLE is used by students to access relevant information about their programme and higher education provision at the College. The College has continuing and planned enhancement activities, which are matched against the Quality Code.

2.21 The carefully tailored provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, supported by the effective use of technology, to enable students to develop as independent, reflective learners is **good practice**.

2.22 The review team concludes that it has confidence in the College approach to working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, to articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking. Expectation B3 is therefore met and the risk in this area is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.23 Strategic oversight for support for students is enabled by the Learning Resource Strategy, which is embedded in the curriculum planning process and supports the Higher Education Teaching Learning and Assessment and Learning Technologies Strategies. The College monitors and evaluates support for student developments and achievement through periodic reviews, the annual review process, termly Course Review, Quality Summits and the Learning and Quality Committee. Formal agreements are in place to allow students access to the resources of Wolverhampton University and Birmingham City University.

2.24 The strategies and approaches the College employs to monitor and evaluate the arrangements and resources in place allow the Expectation to be met.

2.25 The review team considered a range of documentary evidence and met staff and students to investigate the approach the College takes to ensuring that students develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.26 The College provides a range of resources to support higher education students, including physical library resources and online material. Students reported high levels of support from library services, the availability to access books and e-books. The College environment for learning, teaching and research provides drop-in facilities and open learning spaces and a dedicated higher education study deck offering exclusivity to students at Levels 4, 5 and 6. Student support services are delivered through the Student Journey Team and Inclusive Support Team. The Learning Services Team supports the provision of resources, learning opportunities and guidance to enable students to become independent learners. Students are supported in digital and information literacy, study skills and Information Communication Technology. The College was recently highly commended for best practice by the Council for Learning Resources in Colleges peer accreditation.

2.27 The College places the student at the heart of its activities and ambitions. There are high levels of support for students, ranging from support for dyslexia to language and help with visas. There is an 'Early Support Register' and a Student Support Register.

2.28 The online individual learning plan, My Action Planning System, develops learners to become skilled, professional and enterprising. Students are assigned a personal tutor and receive a minimum of three tutorials per academic year. The College has effective electronic systems to support learning. Discussions between staff and students are recorded in My Action Planning System and SMART targets are formulated encouraging students to take ownership of their learning and progress.

2.29 The College encourages progression and has in place systems and processes to assist students to make an effective transition from previous study to higher education and to subsequent careers or further study. Statistics support a good record of students progressing internally. Students value induction. While employer involvement varies across courses, the College has made considerable progress in engaging employers and industry representatives within the boundaries of local opportunities. Although there are no formal placements, the College encourages live briefs and seeks to build on its progress to date.

2.30 The College's Student Voice Strategy 2014-15 articulates the ways in which every student is enabled to take up their right to participate and to experience personal and professional growth as a result of active participation. Increasingly the College is moving the focus away from estates-related issues to identifying issues and making improvements in teaching and learning and the academic experience. The College extrapolates higher education feedback to create an action plan. Student feedback systems are comprehensive. The range of resources and support mechanisms to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential contributes to the good practice identified under Expectation B3. The College has a Teaching and Learning Survey 2012-14 and this shows high levels of student satisfaction.

2.31 The review team concludes that the arrangements in place to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources, which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, ensures that Expectation B4 is met and that this risk in this area is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.32 The College outlines its approach towards student engagement within its Student Voice Strategy 2014-15, which clearly states that the College seeks to deliver the 'best services possible' for students by ensuring they involve students in as many different ways as possible to shape developments in the learning environment. A wide range of feedback mechanisms are in place such as student surveys, unit module evaluations, a student conference and a formal representative system. Feedback provided by students is used to inform an annual student voice action plan. Students are informed about any actions taken in response to their feedback via the Student Voice website and a variety of other communication channels.

2.33 The College's clear strategy, detailed information and well considered framework for student engagement allows the Expectation to be met.

2.34 The review team examined the College's Student Voice Strategy 2014-15, the 2013-14 action plan, training materials for the Student Voice website and the results of student surveys. The team also met staff, students and student representatives, viewed the College website and scrutinised the minutes of programme committees and senior College meetings.

2.35 The College operates a two-tiered approach within their formal representative structure. This sees student voice representatives operating at a programme level and student voice executives representing students at a higher level. Students are aware of who their student representatives are and feel able to engage with them. Training for student representatives is conducted by the Director of Student Journey, the Student Journey Manager and a current higher education student. The delivery materials include reference to the Quality Code. Student representatives are also provided with two opportunities to feedback through the academic year. In addition a Student Conference takes place annually where students are also provided with a brief introduction to the Students' Union and role of representatives. This is followed by a reward event for student representatives.

2.36 The formal representative system is only one of seven mechanisms that the College has identified for students to provide feedback, under a scheme which they promote as '7 ways to have your say'. Other mechanisms include meetings with the Principal, the College's Compliments and Complaints Scheme, and focus groups. In practice the team found that an even wider range of feedback mechanisms exist and students were very positive about the extent to which the College engages them, to the point they believed it would be difficult to do more. The team were provided with numerous examples where feedback had been acted upon, such as the enhancements made to the higher education social area, the introduction of a Student Conference and sessions designed to improve employability skills. The team therefore finds that the wide range of inclusive student feedback mechanisms which help maintain and enhance the quality of student learning opportunities is **good practice**.

2.37 Student involvement in quality assurance processes is widespread, systematic and effective. Students are represented on the Higher Education Management Board, Student Voice Committee and Board of Governors. An active Students' Union is also in place within the College with one vice president role dedicated to higher education.

The College has an open door policy to student involvement in formal quality assurance processes and this has led to high levels of participation amongst students. Terms of reference for Course Development Approval and Periodic Review allow for student membership of the panel. Students regularly participate in these processes and have a sound understanding of their role. This approach emanates from the College's considered and well understood Student Voice Strategy. The team found that the well considered and high levels of student involvement in quality assurance processes, including programme design and review, is **good practice**.

2.38 The team ultimately concludes that the College's effective system of student representation and high levels of student involvement and satisfaction, together with the College's clear strategic approach and culture of responding to student feedback, ensure that Expectation B5 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning

Findings

2.39 For programmes approved by awarding bodies, assessments are set by the relevant academic departments of the University of Wolverhampton and Birmingham City University. For courses leading to Pearson BTEC Higher National Qualifications standard assessment regulations are in place. Course teams adhere to the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment (Levels 4-7). Students are referred to the Course Handbooks for further details. Assessment and learning outcomes are outlined in the Academic Regulations.

2.40 The College articulates its assessment practices in the Higher Education: Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy where the FHEQ qualification descriptors are detailed and the generic outcomes and attributes required for each qualification set out. The Academic Regulations: Higher Education have been designed to ensure that outcomes are delivered successfully at Levels 4, 5 and 6. Level 6 outcomes are determined by the awarding body and set out in their material.

2.41 The College's approach to assessment, working largely with awarding body designed assessments and processes or within the framework expressed in the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment, allow the Expectation to be met.

2.42 The team reviewed a range of documentary evidence. The course (and module) handbooks reflect awarding body academic frameworks and regulations. The Higher Education Academic Regulations Handbook further identifies the assessment requirements for Pearson awarded programmes. The College's VLE provides links to awarding body academic regulations, to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the requirements of credit.

2.43 Programme leaders agree an annual assessment plan, which outlines assessment type, confirmation of learning outcomes assessed, deadlines, first marker and internal examiner. In some courses live briefs are used for assessment tasks, where students undertake activities for employers that help to ensure the currency and relevance of assessments. Students are positive about this approach.

2.44 Student work is marked and moderated by College tutors initially, and there is then shared moderation with the awarding bodies, before samples are sent to external examiners. At specific intervals during the year the awarding body convenes an assessment board, which is usually attended by the external examiner. Grades are confirmed at this point and any resubmissions agreed. External examiners confirm their satisfaction with the board procedures and satisfactory achievement of learning outcomes in their reports. Pearson awarded programmes have first and second marking undertaken within the College, and the College links directly with the external examiner. External examiners confirm their satisfaction with assessment processes. For Pearson awards, confirmation of credit and award of the qualification is confirmed by the Higher Education Assessment Board.

2.45 Students who the reviewers met reported that they are very satisfied with assessment briefs, assessment feedback, assessment criteria, timeliness of return of

assessed work, and moderation processes. The College has a suitable process for accommodated assessments for those students with protected characteristics. The regulations for the accreditation of prior learning are run in accordance with the awarding bodies and awarding organisation.

2.46 The College has a clear strategy for assessment, which gives a shared set of principles across the course teams. Assessment methods are appropriately designed or approved by the awarding body to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes. Criteria and expectations for assessment are clearly presented to students, and feedback received is helpful and timely. Cross marking and moderation assure standards. The regular review of programmes, which draws on evidence from external examiners, module reviews and student feedback, provides evidence of appropriate assessment practices within the College.

2.47 The review team concludes that Expectation B6 is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.48 External examiners are provided by Pearson and by the College's awarding bodies, Wolverhampton University and Birmingham City University.

2.49 The nomination and appointment of external examiners falls within the remit of the regulations and processes of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation.

2.50 The role of the external examiner is outlined in the Academic Regulations: Higher Education and Higher Education Strategy 2014-16. The actions taken in response to the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review recommendation to obtain all external examiner feedback for the College's provision from all partner institutions to ensure academic standards include the central collation of all external examiner feedback from partner institutions and the central monitoring of actions taken in response to external examiner reports. In addition external examiner report summaries appear in higher education student handbooks.

2.51 The external examiners appointed by the awarding bodies and awarding organisation, and the College's recognition of the role of the external examiners and the processes in place to ensure that external examiner reports are considered and responded to, allow the Expectation to be met.

2.52 The review team examined documentation, policies and procedures and met staff and students to establish the scrupulous use of external examiners on the part of the College.

2.53 All external examiners' reports for the College's provision, together with those from the partner institutions, are collated centrally. These inform course improvement plans and are monitored by Curriculum Managers, who have responsibility for academic and resource planning to ensure the currency and relevance of the provision and Heads of Cluster. All higher education courses have a formal Assessment Board to confirm achievement and to ensure that academic standards are met against the FHEQ. This meeting includes a full review of external examiner reports.

2.54 Actions are addressed by course teams and the Heads of Cluster and monitored centrally. The Quality Summits and Higher Education Enhancement Cycle also reference the role of the external examiner.

2.55 External examiner reports are summarised in higher education student handbooks and full reports are available on the higher education student VLE. Students are aware of the publication of external examiner reports.

2.56 Pearson and the awarding bodies allocate a subject-specific external examiner to a programme sector to conduct sampling of assessed student work and to provide judgments and feedback. The external examiner works with the delivery team in identifying good practice and areas for further development, providing guidance on ways in which to improve delivery. Programme leaders work closely with their external examiner to ensure that the College's implementation, delivery and assessment are consistent with national standards.

2.57 The team concludes that it has confidence in measures in place to ensure the scrupulous use of external examiners and that each qualification is examined against the

appropriate level of the FHEQ. The review team concludes that Expectation B7 is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.58 The College has a regular and systematic process to monitor and review programmes, which meet the requirements of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Termly reviews inform curricula area Self-Assessment Reports and an annual Higher Education Self-Assessment Report. Progress of annual monitoring and review is overseen through the College's deliberative committee structure, principally via the Higher Education Management Board. The College undertakes responsibility for periodic reviews of Pearson awards, on a three yearly cycle. For the programmes governed by awarding bodies, this is the responsibility of the awarding body.

2.59 The College has a management structure and processes in place to enable oversight of its higher education provision, and to meet the review requirements of awarding bodies and the awarding organisation, and therefore allows the Expectation to be met.

2.60 The team reviewed documentary evidence, and minutes from the Higher Education Management Board, and questioned staff in meetings about the process of annual monitoring, review and oversight by the College.

2.61 This confirmed that the processes used to monitor and review programmes of study were as described in the self-evaluation document. In addition, the College uses 'Quality Summits' and 'Courses In Intensive Care' to inform its review procedures. Students are thoroughly aware of these quality assurance processes. The use of student feedback and student panel members in the monitoring and review of programmes contributes to the good practice noted under Expectation B5.

2.62 Programme teams review existing provision drawing on data from module level feedback, student performance, and external examiner feedback and present this through the termly and annual programme review process. Through the Higher Education Management Board, which reports to College Senior Management Team and governors, and the informal interactions within the higher education teaching team, the College has oversight of its provision to maintain standards and assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities.

2.63 The College has systems to enable the oversight and regular review of the standards of its provision from module level to the senior levels within the College. Reviewers noted that at the course level reviews are undertaken termly rather than annually, and that for the awarding organisation programmes periodic review takes place every three years. The involvement of students in reviews is extensive, is consistent with the College's strategy for the student voice, and contributes to the enhancement of their learning. The comprehensive and thorough approach to programme monitoring and review and its use to enhance student learning opportunities represents **good practice**.

2.64 The team concludes that Expectation B8 is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.65 The College has a Complaints Policy which outlines the process and timescales for any student or parent wishing to register a complaint. The Deputy Principal Delivery and Success holds overall responsibility for the policy as well as for receiving appeals. Complaints are addressed by the Head of Quality in the first instance. Academic appeals, as opposed to appeals relating to a complaint, are governed separately by the Assessment and Verification Policy. Termly reports highlighting complaints and appeals are collated and considered during annual monitoring. The level of information available for students in their handbooks about complaints is variable depending on their awarding body.

2.66 The College's management of complaints including information it produces for students, the process itself and monitoring arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

2.67 The review team scrutinised the College website, Complaints Policy and Assessment and Verification Policy. The team also met students and staff, including the Head of Quality and Deputy Principal Delivery. In addition they viewed the College's tracking system and termly reports relating to complaints and appeals.

2.68 Information relating to complaints and appeals is easily accessible and located on the Student Voice website as well as on the College and University sites. Programme handbooks contain information relating to academic appeals although reference to the complaints process could be made more explicit in programme handbooks linked to Pearson. Students know where to access relevant information and confirm that it is also covered during induction.

2.69 Staff clearly understand the interrelationship between the College and its awarding bodies and awarding organisation in relation to complaints and appeals. Staff provided an example of a student complaint which was progressed with their awarding organisation. Monitoring reports are comprehensive and in addition to capturing the resolution also take account of any learning points that can inform future practice, most recently a need to ensure students understand their fee liability, should they choose to withdraw from the programme, upon enrolment.

2.70 Owing to the comprehensive policies, detailed monitoring reports, clear oversight responsibility and accessible information for students the review team concludes that Expectation B9 is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B10): Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.

Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*

Findings

2.71 As noted in other sections of this judgment area the College has engagement with employers in many areas. Employers are involved in the design and validation of programmes and in ensuring modules and assessments are current. The College has 'Industry Expert Learning Walks' where employers comment on the currency of the College programmes. The College extensively uses live briefs from employers as student assessments. For its further education provision the College has placements on a number of its programmes. However this is not so for its higher education provision. The College higher education provision has no placements, and no learning opportunities are delivered at other organisations. This Expectation is therefore not applicable to this provider.

Expectation (B11): Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.72 The College does not offer research degrees and therefore this Expectation is not applicable to this provider.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.73 In reaching its judgment the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.74 Of the nine applicable Expectations for this judgement area (the provider has no engagement with Expectations B10 or B11), all nine were met with low risk. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area. There are four areas of good practice, one under Expectation B3, two under Expectations B5 and one under Expectation B8. The areas of good practice also relate to Expectations B1, B3 and B4.

2.75 The review team note that the areas of good practice are significant, cross College and embedded. In particular they note the following.

- The overarching commitment to carefully tailored learning resources enhanced by appropriate use of technology which enables students to develop as independent reflective learners. This has led to the good practice under Expectation B3.
- The highly comprehensive approach to programme review, leading to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. This has led to the good practice under Expectation B8.
- The very strong engagement of students in the design, delivery and monitoring of programmes in particular and quality assurance of programmes and enhancement of the learning opportunities in general. This has led to the two areas of good practice under Expectation B5.
- Students spoke very highly of the availability of resources and the quality of staff teaching and support for their studies.
- The College has many strengths and no weaknesses in the area of student learning opportunities and has plans to enhance this further.

2.76 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at Walsall College is **commended**.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The College considers that it distributes information about its higher education provision which is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. It attributes this in large part to its Higher Education Collecting Information for Publication Policy which provides an overview of the responsibilities, timescales and approval procedures for information produced within the College.

3.2 The Higher Education Collecting Information and Publication Policy clearly articulates who is responsible for both generating and approving information. Curriculum teams hold responsibility for constructing information although for some formats, such as handbooks, the Marketing Team provides a central template which must be populated. The Head of Cluster for Higher Education is responsible for approving content and the Head of Marketing holds parallel responsibility for approving design.

3.3 The College's policy for the management of information is comprehensive and clear in relation to responsibilities at the approval stage. However the policy does not cover continuous monitoring, review arrangements or the role of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation, in relation to the management of information, to the same extent. These are also not covered explicitly in the College's Academic Regulations. Despite this the College's policies and processes would allow the Expectation to be met but they would benefit from being strengthened in certain areas.

3.4 The review team viewed the College website, VLE and intranet. The team also viewed a range of policies and procedures as well as student handbooks and the Higher Education Course Guide. In addition the team met students and staff, including those responsible for constructing information.

3.5 Approval must be sought from the relevant link employee from the awarding body or awarding organisation before information relating to the programme is published. Information is considered as part of the College's internal course approval process and in approval events held by the awarding bodies.

3.6 Students are largely positive about the information they receive, including prospectuses, handbooks, course guides and the VLE, which hosts survey results, including from the National Student Survey, external examiner reports and also minutes of meetings which pertain to higher education at the College. Students also commented favourably about the higher education newsletter and information relating to enhancement activity undertaken by the College.

3.7 Students and staff were able to provide examples where the institution had responded to student feedback in relation to information. For instance, the College website has been revised recently based on feedback from several user groups. A dedicated higher education section is now accessible from the homepage which is full of related content and prospective students are also now able to search for course rather than cluster area. The prospectus has also been altered so that it is more visually appealing and portable for

students, who have also reported that they value the use of case studies as a means of understanding potential employability outcomes. In addition the prospectus houses detailed information about student support, finance and the application process.

3.8 Staff are provided with access to policies, procedures and resources connected to quality assurance and enhancement via the Quality intranet site, in a dedicated higher education section. Staff were clear about how to access information relating to quality assurance procedures, the majority of which are detailed in the Academic Regulations and associated policies.

3.9 The team did find a series of minor omissions, errors and inconsistencies in information produced by the College. For example, the College's approach to communicating definitive programme information to students is variable. In a number of cases this information is focussed at module or unit level and there is no consistent approach to communicating programme level aims and learning outcomes. Although students are clear about what was expected of them, making this information explicit in programme handbooks would improve the accessibility of information provided to students. The team therefore **recommends** that by May 2015 the College specify programme level aims and learning outcomes in all programme handbooks.

3.10 Information contained in student handbooks, which outlined the time taken to complete various higher education levels of study, inaccurately suggested that a doctoral programme could be completed in one year. While these issues do not represent major oversights or serious risk they have been made possible, in part, due to shortcomings in the College's processes for the approval and monitoring of information which are not always made explicit in their policy documentation. While the College's documented processes are explicit and broadly speaking strong in communicating expectations surrounding information at the approval stage, they are quieter in relation to the ongoing monitoring of information. The team therefore **recommends** that by May 2015 the College strengthen the approval and monitoring processes to ensure that information is fit for purpose, accessible and transparent.

3.11 The team concludes that as a result of clear responsibilities in relation to the creation, approval and review of information, high student satisfaction and range of materials, Expectation C is met. However the team identified a number of minor errors and inconsistencies in information that improved approval and explicit monitoring arrangements would have been likely to identify. The team therefore views the College's arrangements for the management of information as broadly adequate but with some shortcomings and therefore considers the risk in this area to be moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The quality of the information about learning opportunities: Summary of findings

3.12 In reaching its judgment the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.13 Expectation C is met but the level of risk is moderate. There are two recommendations, and no affirmations or areas of good practice.

3.14 While the level of risk is judged as moderate Expectation C is met and the team judges the College's arrangement for the management of information as broadly adequate. The review team concludes that the quality of the information produced by the College about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy and therefore **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Findings

4.1 The strategic approach to enhancement is the responsibility of the College Senior Management Team and is addressed through the strategy documents they have led and through the deliberative committee structures. The strategic approach to enhancement is expressed in the Student Voice Strategy, elements of the Higher Education Quality Strategy and Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. The delivery of the enhancement strategy is discussed within the Higher Education Management Board, Learning and Quality Committee and the Higher Education Tutor Committee.

4.2 The College has a set of strategic aims and policies that taken together allow the Expectation to be met.

4.3 The review team examined documentary evidence provided in strategy and planning documents and meeting notes, and raised questions in meetings, with a focus on how the various enhancement initiatives were organised in a systematic and planned manner that together formed a strategic approach at the College level.

4.4 The College claims that enhancement initiatives are integrated systematically and are planned. Ten initiatives in the current academic year are being rolled out, including the provision of new higher education resources and plans for enhanced employability activities. As a result of the College Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review, its commitment to enhancing the student experience has become more central and it is involved in a National Union of Students project to enhance student engagement. This is contributing to a higher education ethos where enhancement is expected and encouraged. The College actively learns from its quality assurance processes and shares good practice as a result. Annual Self-Assessment Reports require the identification of good practice, and, for example, student comments from teaching observations are used to share information on teaching sessions.

4.5 Quality assurance processes are used to inform enhancement initiatives. The introduction of triennial periodic review for Pearson awarded programmes is cited as an example. In this case the awarding organisation did not require the College to undertake periodic review in this way. However, the College determined that more regular reviews gave teams the opportunity to discuss programmes detail in a consultative and positive forum with senior managers, students and external members, confirming the viability, opportunities for enhancement and plans for investment for those programmes reviewed to date.

4.6 Enhancement activities exist at a strategic level, and include the website launch, the provision of dedicated higher education space, and a new studio. Examples of enhancement activities at a more local level include changing the start date of the academic year in response to student feedback; differentiated induction for new and returning students; and the introduction of a higher education student conference. The review team noted the completion of enhancement activities are in response to the previous Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review. These included external examiner reports being uploaded to an internal software tracker system to ensure continuous monitoring.

4.7 The College's pursuit of enhancement is manifest in the range of current initiatives, and this is helping the College to develop and reinforce an ethos in its higher education team

that expects and encourages the enhancement of student learning opportunities. This is reported through annual monitoring processes and appropriately overseen by the Higher Education Management Board and other College committees. Students recognise the approach to enhancement, and the engagement of students with quality processes is particularly well embedded. The wide range of mechanisms students have to feedback their experiences are enhancing the quality of their learning opportunities, as is noted as good practice under Expectation B5. Moreover, the particular thoroughness of the approach to programme monitoring and review, as noted as good practice under Expectation B8, is further enhancing student learning opportunities.

4.8 It is clear that relevant sections of Part B of the Quality Code are incorporated into the working practices of the College. The College has systems to disseminate good practice and make use of its review mechanisms to identify opportunities for improvement. A range of enhancement initiatives are ongoing that are linked to the College's various strategic intentions. The review team has confidence that the College is progressing effectively to fully embed its strategy for enhancement. The review team concludes that the Expectation (Enhancement) is met and that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.9 In reaching its judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.10 The Expectation (Enhancement) is met and with low risk. There are no recommendations, affirmations or examples of good practice associated with this judgement area, although the areas of good practice identified under Expectations B5 and B8 are also relevant to this judgement area.

4.11 Given that the Expectation (Enhancement) is met with low risk the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Findings

5.1 The College prides itself on its work involving students in quality assurance and enhancement. The College is performing well in this area as evidenced by the features of good practice identified under Expectation B5. The College is ambitious in relation to student engagement, and is seeking to take this work 'beyond outstanding'. The College believes this can be achieved, at least in part, by acting on recommendations contained within a report produced as a result of a joint Association of Colleges and National Union of Students project. Positive development has been identified as a result of this project such as joint agenda setting at the Higher Education Management Board, efforts to replicate activity delivered as part of the Student Conference at other points in the year, and a focus on maintaining high levels of student engagement as higher education provision within the College grows.

5.2 The College employ a wide range of feedback mechanisms, as noted under Expectation B5 of this report, including a formal system of student representation, Higher Education Conference, Student Voice Committee, and meetings with the Principal, many of which derive from the College's Student Voice Strategy. The efforts to brand feedback mechanisms under the '7 ways to have your say' banner has been effective and are well understood by students, who feel as though feedback is listened to and acted upon. The College also has a recognised Students' Union and students feel this organisation is supporting the overall student experience.

5.3 The use of the VLE and the Student Voice site to communicate with students is effective. This results in an acute understanding among students about changes being made within the College and enables them to feel part of the process. This is well supplemented by information contained on posters and notice boards across the College.

5.4 Student involvement in committees is routine across the College. The Board of Governors has the Student Voice Committee as a standing committee and members include Executive Course Representatives and Student Governors, although the team noted that the Board is not guaranteed participation by higher education students due to the constituencies from which the two elected student posts are drawn. The Higher Education Management Board also has three student members and there are high levels of student involvement in periodic review activity.

5.5 In summary the team concludes that student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement activity within the College is a considerable strength of the provision.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 27-29 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx.

Academic standards

The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Award

A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

Blended learning

Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

Credit(s)

A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

Degree-awarding body

A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

Distance learning

A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'.

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

Expectations

Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

Flexible and distributed learning

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FHEQIS).

Good practice

A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

Learning opportunities

The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

Learning outcomes

What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

Multiple awards

An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

Operational definition

A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

Programme (of study)

An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

Programme specifications

Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

Public information

Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code

Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

Reference points

Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Subject Benchmark Statement

A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard

The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **Frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

Widening participation

Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

QAA1106 - R4048 - Feb 15

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786